



**United States Department of Agriculture  
Natural Resources Conservation Service**

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[www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov)

March 28, 2005

**Dear Massachusetts Farm Operator:**

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has announced that selected watersheds in Berkshire County and Essex County are among the 202 watersheds nationwide to be included in the Conservation Security Program (CSP) in 2005. We are contacting you as a farm owner or operator who may have land in these watersheds to let you know you may be eligible to apply for CSP during the sign-up period that begins today and continues through **May 27, 2005**.

The purpose of CSP is to reward the best conservation farmers for their stewardship efforts and motivate others to become good stewards of the land. CSP, part of the 2002 Farm Bill, was introduced last summer in 18 watersheds nationwide. This spring marks the first opportunity for Massachusetts farmers who practice good soil and water conservation to participate.

This new stewardship program offers payments, for five or ten-year contracts, on part or all of an agricultural operation. The more conservation work you have completed and promise to do in the near future, the higher payment you are eligible to receive. To qualify for CSP, farms must have soil erosion and water quality practices in place, including nutrient and pest management. Lands that are eligible include cropland, orchards, vineyards, hay land, pasture lands, and incidental forest land.

About one eighth of the nation's eligible farmers will be given the chance to apply each year over an eight-year period. The program will continue to be offered each year, on a rotational basis, in as many watersheds as funding allows. **Farms located in the Massachusetts watersheds selected in 2005 may not be eligible to apply for CSP again until 2013.**

The CSP signup process is different from other USDA conservation programs. Participants are required to conduct a self-assessment to determine on their own whether or not they are eligible for the program. Before taking the self-assessment, NRCS recommends you complete the preliminary checklist on the back of this letter.

If you can answer "yes" to most of these questions you are potentially eligible to participate in CSP and should call your local NRCS office listed on the back to get details on and reserve a spot at one of several upcoming informational meetings and/or workshops where you will learn more about the specifics of the CSP program for 2005 and receive a copy of the self-assessment workbook.

If you answer "no" to most of the checklist questions, you should still consider completing the self-assessment in the next few months to help you prepare for future CSP signups and to help NRCS identify programs in which you can better protect the natural resources on your farm. To learn more about CSP and to get a copy of the self-assessment workbook, contact your local NRCS office or go to our website at [www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp](http://www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp).

Sincerely,

CECIL B. CURRIN  
State Conservationist

The Natural Resources Conservation Service provides leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources and environment.

An Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer

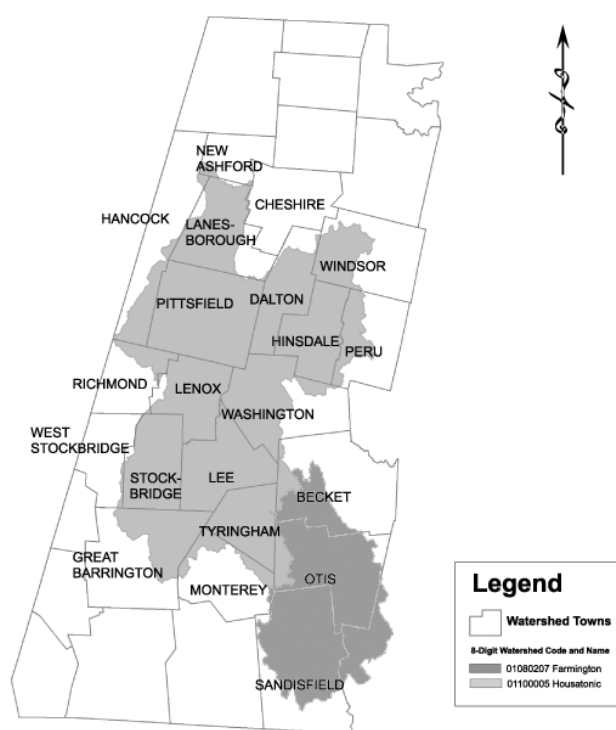
## PRE-SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

The following questions will help you determine if your land might be eligible for CSP. **Answer these questions only for land you are considering enrolling in CSP.** Forestland and farmsteads are not eligible for CSP. However, forested land that is an incidental part of an agricultural operation is eligible.

	YES	NO	N/A
Do you own or operate agricultural land in one of the watersheds highlighted on the maps below?			
Do you take soils tests and follow the recommendations when applying nutrients/fertilizer?			
Do you have records of <u>where, how much and when</u> you apply nutrients/fertilizer?			
Does your operation maintain permanent vegetative cover on most of your farmland?			
If you graze livestock, do you rotate livestock in the pasture according to forage production, allowing for adequate re-growth periods between rotations?			
Do you restrict animal access to streams, ponds and wetlands?			
If you raise cultivated or row crops (i.e., potatoes, corn, beans, vegetables) do you follow a crop rotation so these crops are only produced half of the years and hay or small grains (i.e., oats, barley) are grown the other years?			
If you apply pesticides do you have records that document the pesticide type, amount, time applied and rate?			

- ✓ If you can answer “yes” to most of these questions, you are possibly eligible for CSP.
- ✓ If you cannot answer “yes” to most of these, there may be other conservation programs that can help you become eligible for CSP.

## MASSACHUSETTS CSP WATERSHEDS, 2005 & CONTACT INFORMATION



Berkshire County	Essex County
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